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## ABSTRACT

This review surveys recent documents previously announced in RIE that are concerned with school district reorganization. The review begins with a survey of literature on three interrelated variables that affect district consolidation and redistricting -- district size, educational quality, and educational costs. Succeeding sections present a compilation of reorganization studies and reports, an examination of some implementation problems and procedures, and a consideration of literature on forces opposing reorganization. A 27-item bibliography of related literature is included. (Author)

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## School District Reorganization

as Templeton

We recommend that States in reorganizing school districts take into account the following factors: (1) the needs of diverse geographical areas and social backgrounds; (2) other criteria for consideration in establishing school districts are a more equal tax base for equal supplementation of State funding, the capability of providing all levels of schooling from kindergarten to high school, the availability of educational programs for handicapped, for vocational purposes, and for other special needs; (3) boundaries that would facilitate cooperation with agencies providing health, welfare, and other school-associated services, and administrative economies.

*The National Commission on School Finance (1962)*

School district reorganization is a broad concept that can include such diverse events as a shift of personnel and responsibilities within a district or a complete merger of two or more independent districts. The concept is often limited, however, to situations in which school district boundaries are changed. When restricted in this manner, school district reorganization usually takes one of two forms.

Traditionally, reorganization has been primarily a concern of rural areas where small local districts were consolidated to obtain the administrative economies and educational benefits usually associated with large districts. As education continues to require specialists in reading, counseling, vocational education, media, and so forth, consolidation will remain important to small schools unable to afford specialized personnel and the facilities they need.

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As The President's Commission suggests, however, reorganization has become a concern of nonrural areas. Educators and researchers realize that not all urban and suburban districts are equal. District size can contribute to this inequality, but the more important factors often are the availability of school-related services, the extent of a district's tax base, and the social, economic, and racial composition of a district's population. Redistricting is now being used in an attempt to correct these inequalities among nonrural districts.

Throughout the literature, both school district consolidation and redistricting are referred to as reorganization. For this reason and because consolidation and redistricting are concerned with providing equal education for all students within and among districts, the broad use of the term reorganization is retained in this review.

The review begins with a survey of literature on three interrelated variables that affect district consolidation and redistricting—district size, educational quality, and educational cost. Succeeding sections present a compilation of reorganization studies and reports; an examination of some implementation problems and procedures; and a consideration of literature on forces opposing reorganization.

Of the documents reviewed, twenty-one are available from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service. Complete instructions for ordering are given at the end of the review.

#### **DISTRICT SIZE, EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, AND COST**

Hickey (1969) provides both a framework and a rationale for considering school district reorganization. He discusses the problems involved in determining optimum school district size, studies the characteristics of inadequate districts, and examines five criteria commonly used to determine optimum size:

1. Scope of program
2. Range of educational services
3. The community
4. Administrative and instructional staff
5. Economic base

Trends in district reorganization, especially decentralization and community control, are discussed and a table summarizing recommendations for optimum size is included. Because situational variables are strong and may profoundly influence the size-quality relationship in a district,

Hickey concludes that size must be viewed as a variable and not as an absolute factor.

A report compiled by Farrar and Purdy (1968) discusses school district size as it affects district organization and objectives. The authors examine the relationship of district size to elementary schools, secondary schools, administrative districts, intermediate agencies, metropolitan centers, administrative costs, population distribution, operational costs, educational quality, student achievement, educational opportunities, and building costs. Tables present suggestions by various organizations and individuals for minimum, optimum, and maximum sizes of elementary and secondary attendance centers, administrative districts, intermediate agencies, and special services.

In discussing school reorganization trends in the nation and in New England, Cronin (n.d.) notes that from 1932 to 1965, the number of school districts in the United States decreased from 127,649 to 26,802. In New England, however, there was a

decrease of less than one hundred districts. Redistricting into school districts serving fifty thousand students would reduce the number of New England districts from 1,609 to 48.

Cronin observes three major forces that will precipitate a revision of school districting patterns:

- the impatient layman who refuses to finance small secondary and grade schools
- federal programs that offer various incentive packages
- teachers and school administrators who desire more manageable jobs and more humane working conditions

Cronin believes that support for reorganization in New England will come from cultural changes and from advances in technology that require an updating of the educational system.

Purdy (1967) believes that the existing pattern of administrative organizational structures in most states is inadequate to provide comprehensive educational opportunities for all children, regardless of their socioeconomic status. Although no universally acceptable set of reorganization standards is available, some empirical data are available for planning more adequate local school district structures. Purdy notes the development of two separate approaches. One is the formation of local school districts of sufficient size to meet the educational needs of all children. The second makes local school districts as large as practicable, but allocates high cost and specialized functions to some kind of regional agency. Although school district reorganization is needed in several sections of the country, the author concludes that many counterforces tend to impede progress in this area.

Several reports affirm that consolidating small districts into larger ones does not

necessarily mean that economy of scale will be reached. Sabulao and Hickrod (1970) find that expenditures per student decrease as the size of the school increases up to a certain enrollment level at which the greater complexity of the school increases expenditures. Both Coleman (1972) and the Educational Research Service (ERS) (1971) find that optimum district size in terms of cost varies widely among states and provinces.

The ERS information aid emphasizes that district reorganization may not reduce tax rates. Consolidation should, however, improve educational quality by increasing a district's student population and tax base, which makes it feasible to provide specialized courses, teachers, and facilities. In support of the advantages of reorganized districts, ERS cites a study comparing achievement of students (with equal ability) in reorganized and nonreorganized districts. Results show that students in the reorganized districts demonstrate significantly greater achievement on standardized tests.

ERS (1971), Coleman (1972), and some studies cited in the next section discuss dangers inherent in oversized districts. Rather than dealing in numbers, the ERS suggests considering more general criteria for establishing effective school districts. Similar to those suggested by Hickey, these criteria are based on the findings of two studies:

1. *Scope of the program.* The district should offer a comprehensive program of elementary and secondary education. Some authorities include nursery schools, kindergarten, junior college, and adult education.
2. *Range of educational services.* The district should provide a complete range of educational services, including: special

classes for physically and mentally handicapped; remedial programs for under-achievers; special programs for academically gifted pupils; and health, guidance, and counseling services for all pupils.

3. *The community.* The district should include one well-defined community, or a group of interrelated communities which form a natural sociological area.
4. *Administrative and instructional staff.* The district should be large enough to employ specialized administrative and supervisory personnel and teachers with preparation in all areas taught.
5. *Economic base.* The district must be able to support financially the kind of educational program implied by the above criteria. Statements of economic criteria may refer to the total income available to the district or its financial efficiency as measured by cost per pupil.
6. *Time and distance from school.* The district must be small enough so that pupils, particularly elementary pupils, should not have to spend an inordinate amount of time in transit. This concern is particularly important in sparsely populated rural areas in some of the states in the Western part of the United States.
7. *Racial composition of the district.* The district should, if feasible, include areas which contain a substantial number of members of minority groups.

ERS (1971)

### STUDIES AND REPORTS

If local school districts are to provide equal educational opportunities throughout a metropolitan area, school organization plans should distribute populations among districts in a manner that maximizes the aggregate expressed demand for educational services and provides relatively equal financial support. Alkin (1968) reports that plans to consolidate contiguous districts and unify countywide or multicounty governments

are inadequate to meet the financial needs of metropolitan areas.

The author feels that a better solution lies in the creation of school districts that are relatively comparable in financial resources and educational needs, internally heterogeneous, competitive with nonschool and other school governments, and large or small enough to be free from the constraints of economies and diseconomies of scale. For state aid to be effective in equalizing educational opportunities among districts, a satisfactory index of educational need must be developed and applied. Block grants give promise of filling the need for an equitable and acceptable distribution of federal funds.

A study of school districts in the Kansas City and St. Louis metropolitan areas (Hooker and Mueller 1969) is part of a larger study entitled *School District Organization for Missouri* (University of Minnesota 1968). After a discussion of political, social, and economic factors affecting schools in most metropolitan areas, the paper focuses on Kansas City and St. Louis where gross inequalities of educational opportunity are seen to exist. A new structure for public education in Missouri is described by the authors as a regional school district with limited responsibilities for each of the metropolitan areas. The goal of the new district is to provide equal educational opportunities for all residents of the Kansas City and St. Louis areas.

An Educational Research Services, Inc. (1965) publication discusses the proposed merger of the Rye City and Rye Neck school districts in Westchester County, New York. The publication presents an overview of the two school systems and discusses principles and issues involved in the proposed merger. Enrollment expectations, facility requirements, and educational and financial im-

plications of the merger receive attention. The educational needs of the communities served, the unique requirements of the two districts, and the governmental structures involved are considered in assessing alternative actions that might be taken.

In a report of projects and programs operating in cooperation with the Regional Curriculum Project, Hardin and Martin (1968) highlight major topics discussed during a workshop on reorganization of small school districts. The five major topics are "The Great Plains Project," relating to planning for reorganization; "The Moore County Reorganization Project," reporting a successful reorganization; "The Role of the Consultant," describing reorganization in terms of the role of the state department of education; "The Intermediate Service Unit," discussing the usefulness of an intermediate educational agency; and "Procedures for Reorganization," containing eight main recommendations.

Deeb (1967) examines the problems of a Kentucky county school consolidation as they relate to the educational program. Changes in the instructional program were initiated by the board of education to meet more adequately the needs of all students in the district. Questions about the changes and consolidation include:

- What were the differences in purposes of the schools?
- What are the differences in the organizational structure?
- What are the changes in facilities resulting from consolidation?
- What are the changes in curriculum content?
- What are the differences in the instructional materials?
- What is the effect of consolidation on the professional staff?

As background for the case study, Deeb includes a historical sketch, reasons for consolidation, evaluation of changes after consolidation, and hypotheses for future attempts to solve reorganization problems.

Budd (1966) studied thirty-two Arkansas county school districts, located primarily in rural areas, to determine the influence of rurality, financial resources, quality of education, and school performance on county school districts. Both case study and statistical methods were employed in the analysis. She found that expenditures per enrollee were approximately the same for county and independent districts, but that county districts spent a greater percentage of funds on transportation and less for indebtedness. Recommendations of the study include dissolution of county districts and their annexation to trade-center community districts, enlargement of teacher salaries to attract better qualified teachers, provision of a minimum millage rate so that each district would be financed to the extent of its wealth, and provision of adequate administrative personnel.

Focusing primarily on the community involvement and financial aspects of reorganization, Coleman (1971) studies the purpose of school district structure and the manner in which it reflects citizens' expectations for their school system. He examines the basic patterns of school district reorganization in North America and the concepts of local control and accountability as they relate to community involvement in school districts. His discussion uses three main sets of criteria for school district reorganization: educational, financial, and community involvement. The report concludes with some possible reorganization plans for the region under study.

Concern for redistricting is not limited



to particular cities or regions. The following documents, by state, study or recommend statewide redistricting:

Alaska—Alaska Governor's Committee on Education (1966)

Georgia—George Peabody College for Teachers (1965)

Idaho—Bell (1968)

Iowa—Stephens and others (1967)

Kansas—Kampschroeder (1967)

Missouri—University of Minnesota (1968)

Nebraska—Schroeder and others (1968)

Ohio—De Good (1968)

Oregon—Business Task Force on Education, Inc. (1969)

Vermont—Dunham (1964)

### IMPLEMENTATION

The impact of recent technological, social, and economic changes has necessitated a reexamination of educational structure and has resulted in school district reorganization projects in many states. Summers (1968) reviews the various legislative techniques that thirty-three states have employed in their attempts to merge or reorganize school districts, and he determines what kinds of legislation have been effective in establishing adequate district structure. Current legislation is divided into three distinct categories: permissive, semi-permissive, and mandatory. Examples of these types of legislation are provided. The author also draws conclusions concerning the important features that should be included in state laws to promote effective district reorganization.

Similarly, Link (1971) notes that increasing pressures evolving from societal change, technology, and increasing student needs

are causing rural school districts to consider school district consolidation as a strategy for successful accomplishment of educational goals. The process of redistricting is characterized by complexity, and by inherent internal and community problems. If school districts decide to consolidate, the prime responsibility for the design and implementation of a feasible plan falls with the involved superintendents and the local boards of education.

According to Link, particular attention must be paid to sensitive issues and communication with the community-at-large. An acceptable consolidation plan must contain at least the following ingredients: complete definitions of unique constraints to the consolidation goal; identification of needs, goals, and objectives; establishment of procedures and strategies; design of an evaluation subsystem and related criteria such as provision for feedback; a "programmed" planning model (time-lines, flowcharts, and so forth); and provisions for flexibility. The foregoing ingredients must be coupled with recognized community and educational needs and strong school-to-community communication channels.

Viewing the school district as a political entity, Shafer (1968) devotes attention to both administrative and community problems in connection with school district reorganization. For example, one consequence of reorganization is the enlargement of the school district. The larger educational system requires changes that neither the former school district administration nor the school board may be capable of effecting. To decrease the number of problems inherent in this transition, the author suggests that school administrators prepare themselves for the advent of school district reorganization.

### FORCES OPPOSING REORGANIZATION

The Little Hoover Commission, composed of more than eighty business and industrial leaders, conducted a study of Ohio school districts, and recommended accelerated reorganization and consolidation to improve educational quality. De Good (1968) notes that implementation of the recommendations required dispelling several myths. The first myth (unitary concept myth) is the belief that school districts exist for some single, undefined purpose and that further discussion is precluded until this purpose has been clearly identified. The second myth concerns the maximum size (size limits myth) to which a district should be allowed to grow. Because it is rather easy to define a system as too small, proponents of this myth often demand an equally precise definition of an overpopulated system. Failure to define a specific upper limit is a weak argument for not taking advantage of the services a large district can offer. The third myth (transportation myth) expresses the fear that an increased influx of students from outlying communities will create an unreasonable rise in transportation costs. In actuality, De Good notes, reorganized districts have found that transportation costs rise no more rapidly than other expenses.

The Educational Research Service (1971) cites research on structures and groups that may resist redistricting. One such structure involves state financial provisions that discourage district reorganization. Among resisting groups may be school employees who fear reorganization because reorganized districts may require fewer administrators and more highly qualified teachers than the separate consolidating districts.

The ERS observes that the strongest deterrent to reorganization may be com-

munity resistance. Drawing on the literature, the ERS lists citizen concerns that work against district reorganization:

1. Lack of understanding as to what constitutes an educational program that is both comprehensive and excellent
2. Confusion, misunderstanding, and mistrust because of lack of support by school administrators
3. Fear of losing local control
4. Fear of increased costs, taxation
5. Security in the traditional experiences of the past; resistance to change
6. Fear of increased transportation time and distance for children
7. Conflicts between merging districts—ethnicity, tax system, economic system
8. Political controversy over reorganization
9. Fear of losing community identity
10. Fear of anything "big"

ERS (1971)

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For each order, indicate the ED numbers of the desired publications, the type of reproduction desired (paper or microfiche), and the number of copies being ordered.

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### RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Five criteria commonly used to determine optimum district size are scope of program, range of educational services, the community, administrative and instructional staff, and the economic base. *Hickey (1969)*

The number of school districts in the United States decreased from 127,649 in 1932 to 26,802 in 1965. *Cronin (n.d.)*

The Little Hoover Commission study of Ohio school districts recommends accelerated reorganization and consolidation to improve educational quality. *De Good (1968)*

Although no universally acceptable set of reorganization standards is available, there are sufficient empirical data for planning more adequate local school district structures. *Purdy (1967)*

The solution to the financial demands of metropolitan schools lies in the creation of school districts that are relatively comparable in financial resources and educational needs, internally heterogeneous, competitive with nonschool and other school governments, and large or small enough to be free from the constraints of economies and diseconomies of scale. *Alkin (1968)*

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